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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS OF THE
COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION
HEARING ON THE IMPORTANCE OF
POLLWORKERS:
BEST PRACTICES RECOMMENDATIONS**

OCTOBER 3, 2007

Subcommittee on Elections

Testimony of Michael A. Mauro, Iowa Secretary of State

October 3, 2007

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Zoe Lofgren and Members of the Subcommittee on Elections.

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am honored to be in front of such a distinguished group to discuss something as important as the election process in our country.

My name is Michael A. Mauro and I am the Iowa Secretary of State I was elected in November 2006 and took office in January of 2007. Prior to my election I served as county auditor and commissioner of elections in Iowa's largest county for the last 10 years and have been working in the election field for over 24 years.

I believe this hearing is needed due to all of the changes being made in the election process involving increased training for pollworkers.

Our election officials today come from a variety of backgrounds. Requirements in state laws dictate the number of officials required, party affiliation balance, and the requirement to use the designees of both political parties.

Most election officials in our state and other states, are retirees who are low paid, and lack technical knowledge in operating election equipment and sometimes are physically unable to handle the various types of equipment. They work under extreme pressure and under high scrutiny, and they don't have the practice of overseeing their functions on a routine basis. We can't expect them to retain everything from one election to the next.

Since the 2000 election, there have been drastic changes in almost all areas of elections. Voting equipment has changed nationwide. As a result of the Help America Vote Act, we have statewide voter registration systems, which changes the formatting of poll books and election procedures. Many precincts in the United States have two different types of equipment in each precinct. Precinct officials have to be prepared to teach persons with disabilities to use the new equipment.

Adding to this, in 2004, observers in Iowa and other states showed up at polling places, many of who were attorneys representing presidential candidates and political parties and even the department of justice, to oversee the process. How much can election officials take in one day? In many cases pollworkers were intimidated and as a result showed a reluctance to work at future elections.

Those of you, who think the biggest problem facing the integrity of the election process is computer hackers, are missing the big picture - the weakest link in the election process is the lack of training for county officials and poll workers. If the ballot is not printed, tested and programmed properly you have serious issues. We have to get precinct officials who are able to perform the work and we have to train them well. If the pollworker is not trained properly and does not understand the process, the possibility for error at the polling place could jeopardize the integrity of the election.

Despite all the obstacles and difficulties, many states are doing their best to provide proper training for poll workers.

In Iowa, we have instituted a precinct official certification program with the objective of providing additional training to officials beyond the training they receive from the local county auditor prior to an election.

SEAT Certification Program

Iowa's precinct official training program grew from the success of our State Election Administrator Training (SEAT) program, initiated in 2001 in the aftermath of the 2000 contested election and designed to train the county commissioner of election and their staff, to increase their knowledge and skills in the areas of election administration and voter registration.

SEAT is a partnership between the Secretary of State, the Iowa State Association of County Auditors and the Iowa State Association of Counties. We have also partnered with staff from Iowa State University to facilitate the training sessions and to help provide curriculum. HAVA funding has been used to pay for portions of the SEAT program.

PEO Certification Program

The PEO (precinct election official) certification program was instituted just last year and we have already trained over 2,000 precinct officials statewide. Our goal was to have at least one certified precinct official in each of Iowa's 1,784 precincts by the November, 2008 Presidential Election and we expect to surpass that goal early in 2008.

The curriculum was developed based on the following objectives:

1. Provide uniform training for PEO's across the state of Iowa
2. Teach PEO's how to work together at the polls
3. Teach PEO's how to avoid confrontation with voters or observers
4. Teach PEO's how to identify problems and use available resources to solve them
5. Provide training on operation of voting equipment
6. Provide training on opening and closing the polls
7. Provide training on handling special situations at the polls
8. Provide training on working with voters who have disabilities or special needs

Training in person or online

- Training is offered in person and includes three 2-hour sessions to complete the process
- PEO's can take the training online, except for Session II which requires them to have hands-on experience with the voting equipment used in their precinct
- Training includes a **testing component** which can be done at the last session, taken home and returned to the county auditor, or done via the online system
- Iowa State University works with the county auditors to facilitate the training
- Online training requires a low bandwidth and can be used with any type of internet connection
- The online training is highly interactive with frequent questions and includes online testing

To access our online training program, visit www.iowapeotrainning.org. The PEO guidebook and Election Day polling place scenario videos can be found by visiting the Iowa Secretary of State's website www.sos.state.ia.us, click on Voters/Elections and then on "Pollworker Training Material".

Three sessions required

Session I

1. Introduction to PEO training program
2. Types of elections, differences between them, hours of polling
3. Questions: Responsibilities of the Precinct Chair and Ballot Security
4. Review and Introduction of Emergency Issues
5. Case studies of emergency situations
6. Working together, customer service and identifying problems
7. Case study: working with others and Decision Making Processes

Session II

1. Know how to set up equipment and the polling place
2. Hands-on activities: setting up equipment and the polling place
3. Closing the polls
4. Demonstration on closing the polls on the voting equipment
5. Counting write-in votes
6. Activity: Count the write-ins in small groups with the same ballots for each group, and discuss as a group
7. Finish the paper work to certify the election – ballot record and receipt form, tally book, etc.

Session III

1. How to use the PEO Guidebook during the election
2. Questions and case studies: Voter registration exceptions to include Election Day Registration starting in 2008
3. Provisional and Spoiled Ballots
4. Questions and case studies: Provisional Voting, Spoiled Ballots
5. Sensitivity training and assisting voters with disabilities
6. Questions and case studies: Accessibility to and within the polling place
7. Closing of certification program

The Secretary of State has allocated HAVA funding to provide precinct official training. Precinct officials who take the training are provided with a precinct official guidebook, which I would like to make part of the record of my testimony, in addition to the test that is given to the officials for certification.

The SEAT board of directors is working on a method to track those precincts who have certified workers to determine if there are fewer errors by those who have been certified.

One of the greatest benefits of this program is the confidence that the precinct officials gain from taking the training course; we have learned that officials want more training. The county auditors generally hold a two-hour training course for officials the week before an election when there is a rush to complete other preparations for Election Day. The classes are often crowded in an effort to get everyone trained, and there is so much material, the PEO's have difficulty absorbing it all.

The PEO Certification courses are limited to 24 officials at a time and everyone gets a chance at performing the various duties hands-on.

While this is a step in the right direction, there is still a long way to go. Recruitment of officials is a huge hurdle for local election administrators and turnover is extremely high. Many individuals choose to work for their candidates instead of working at the polls on Election Day, which eliminates many knowledgeable people.

We have to be able to get workers who will be able to handle the technology as well as be able to physically handle the equipment. New ideas need to be explored in recruiting election officials such as allowing individuals to do community service by taking a day away from their regular workplace to work at the polls without penalty.

I'm sure other states have good programs in training and we believe we have one of the best. But despite all the available training programs, the bottom line is, we can't continue to make this job more and more difficult each election cycle and expect under-trained individuals to do the job in a professional manner with no mistakes.

I want to commend the committee for calling attention to the important issue of establishing pollworker training across the country and the need to make improvements.

I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.